POPULAR THEATRE AND DEVELOPMENT IN MELANESIA

by

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PART ONE

Em I Graun Blong Yumi

Dawn on the Sepik River, Papua New Guinea. The early morning sky is colored with an orange-yellow hue tinged with brown; the atmosphere is layered with the Papua New Guinea mist, a familiar image in films about this country; the river is glassy and calm -- pacific. A woman is paddling alone in a canoe on the river; it is a graceful, smooth motion. The action in this video picks up as a Melanesian woman takes a package from a man, followed by the image of several other men loading a canoe.

They are dramatically introduced as members of the Raun Isi Theatre who are on their way to present their play to a village community.

> Narrator voiceover:
> But this is no ordinary trip. Ahead of them is a two day journey, to the village of Gahom in the upper reaches of the Sepik. (*A man in the canoe pulls on the outboard motor cord and they begin their journey upriver.*) There is some urgency to the message Raun Isi is carrying, and in many ways, it is a race against time.[1]

With that, the stage is set for the video. The title is shown; first in Pidgin, appearing at the top of the screen, Em i Graun Blong Yumi (This is Our Land) and then the English subtitle is read, Popular Theatre in Melanesia. In this video, the three theatre groups who are the subjects, the Wan Smol Bag Theatre of Vanuatu, the Raun Isi Theatre of Papua New Guinea, and Sei! Akson Tim of the Solomon Islands, are presented as proponents of alternative development. The theme of the video is that these groups are using the popular theatre approach in their attempts to save the environment, more specifically the forests, from destructive development. These groups and others like them, most notably Raun Raun Theatre of Papua New Guinea, have emerged in the post-colonial era to serve many functions in the developing countries of Melanesia, including

[1]All the quotes, both long and within the text, are taken from the video Em I Graun Blong Yumi. Where needed, the speaker will be identified within parentheses.

educating villagers about the problem of deforestation. Additionally, many videos and films have been produced for the purposes of environmental education, of which this is one.

This video presents the work of the popular theatre groups as crucial in saving the forests -- "it is a race against time" -- and suggests that the encouragement of such theatres in Melanesia could be an effective means for indigenous peoples to regain control over their lives and lands.

The thesis of the video is that changes are occurring, and they are not all bad but they are not all good either. They are good when quality of life is improved, for example, with the use of outboard motors and the provision of modern medicine. They are bad when the changes depicted have to do with destruction, such as of the forests as a result of economic exploitation. Also entwined with the theme of destructive change is that there are solutions, ways to deal with this problem; one of these solutions is popular theatre. The purpose of the essay *in toto* is to examine whether or not this premise is valid. Does popular theatre help the "people?" Does it make their lives better? Are they more or less empowered?

This paper is both a film/video analysis as well as a discussion of the nature and role of popular theatre and is divided into two parts. The "journey" of part one of the paper will be to explore the basic theme of the video and to examine how different elements have been used to convey the theme. I will investigate the ways in which we are provided with information regarding both the Islanders' and the filmmakers' concepts of change, which is an integral part of the theme and which supports the use of popular theatre as an example of positive change. Along the way, I will point out the uses and juxtapositions of the video elements that convey certain ideas, and also a conspicuous omission that weakens the goal of ending the selling of trees.

In the second part of the essay, my journey to explore the efficacy of popular theatre continues as I attempt to discover additional information about popular theatre in

Melanesia that is not found in the video. This information will provide a fuller picture of the popular theatre movement in Melanesia by tracing a historical progression from its tentative beginnings to its current popularity. In addition, the second part of the essay involves an examinination of the development issues that the theatres have faced. With this information and the information provided in the video, Em I Graun Blong Yumi, I will be better equipped to answer questions about the efficacy of these popular theatre activities in promoting a people-centered development. Though efficacy is difficult to validate in a library-oriented research project, I hope to be able to contribute by identifying the kinds of development that these theatres seem to be promoting, whether state-centered, people-centered, or otherwise.

About Positive Change -- The Idyllic Past vs. the Outboard Motor

> Narrator voiceover:
> ... Outboard motors cost money, as does the petrol to run them. *Children are seen picking coconuts from the treetop.* But these have never been static societies ...

Unlike the histrionic films of Dennis O'Rourke (Sharkcallers of Kontu, Yap ... How Did You Know We'd Like TV?) in which the Islander is idealized as uncorrupted prior to western colonialism, this video attempts a more balanced approach, at least in parts. In this atttempt to balance, there is a tension between two ideas: on the one hand, the video seems to be self-conscious about not giving the impression that development, modernization, and change *per se* are bad; on the other hand, that sense of "paradise lost" emerges nevertheless, mostly through the interviews with the Melanesian theatre workers and in the visual images.

In the section discussing Sei!'s work, pre-contact traditional life is described by a member of the group, as if he is telling a folk story.

> Once the people lived happily in their old ways. There were transport problems, but everyone was happy. No one was sick, and they were free to lead their own lives (In Pidgin, English subtitles).

This kind of introduction, as any good storyteller knows, creates anticipation in an audience, and makes for highly effective drama. In the video, the above speech is followed by a segment from Sei!'s logging play, making the connection between the idyllic past described in the interview and the destructive present depicted in the anti-logging play.

This element of drama seems to be needed in order to get the message across, that the problem of deforestation is a serious one. William Takaku, the director of the Papua New Guinea National Theatre, is traveling with the Raun Isi Theatre in this video and because he is so eloquent, the interviews with him add to the drama of the video.

> This is the forest, one of the last wilderness of the world that is left, and this is the forest that the world needs. This is the forest where all the air we are breathing is made from. This is also the forest now under threat from developers. They want to cut all these beautiful trees down. They want to cut and drag them and make them into timber that's going to be sold to you world people. *Looks straight into the camera.* Aaah.

Heightening the dramatic element is the structure of the video which is tied to Raun Isi's river journey "to the upper reaches of the Sepik." There is almost a missionary fervor about the way this journey is presented, the "urgency," the "message," the "race against time." The theatre members are outsiders, going into the upper reaches of the Sepik for the first time. Their mission is to inform the villagers about "development." As Takaku says:

> And these people in Gahom, they are very well in tune with the forest, but they are not very well tuned with the outside world, the world of development.

A member of Sei! also speaks about their goal of educating the people in the rural areas of the Solomon Islands about development.

> What we are trying to do is widen people's thinking, and make them aware of what is happening in our country now. At the time of independence, this word "development" came, but most people still don't know what development means.

But the involvement of the theatre groups in village development is presented as a positive outside influence, just as constructive as the outboard motor that they use to travel to the village.

The outboard motor in this video can also be taken as a symbol for acceptable change. One of the opening images showing Raun Isi embarking on their journey up the Sepik River is of the use of the outboard motor on a traditional long canoe. Towards the end of the journey, however, the outboard motors become useless in the rapids and shallow water, alluding to the imperfect nature of technology. Sei! Akson Tim in the Solomon Islands also reach their destination via use of modern machinery, a speedboat. And in Vanuatu, members of the Wan Smol Bag Theatre are shown first arriving on an airplane, and then using a pickup truck to travel around. Of course, the use of video technology allows the theatre work to travel even further than these islands.

The use of popular theatre is in itself an example of a modern use of a traditional practice. This idea is presented in the opening segment; a member of Sei! is interviewed and he contrasts the way they use drama with traditional performance practices.

> In olden times, drama was used for traditional ceremonies, or traditional feasts, or for making fun so people might laugh. But now, it's part of education, which is very good (English subtitles of Pidgin interview).

Change is also acceptable if modern medicine can prevent premature death, pain, and illness. The village of Gahom, where the Raun Isi Theatre visit, is described by the narrator as "a fragile community."

> The people of Gahom are slowly dying, the old killers like malaria, dysentary, and pneumonia have been joined by such imports as measles and hepatitis. Gradually, there comes a new dependance on modern drugs. Without them, the death toll would be even greater.

The video provides this information as a way to segué into the villagers' plight, that they are "vulnerable to any outside influences" (Em I Graun ..., Narrator).

The Epitome of Negative Change -- Logging

Leading up to the theme of the video -- destruction of the rainforest -- the video includes western religion as among these outside influences. Here, the narrator resorts to a more typical "fatal impact" attitude, that western influence was totally destructive and that the Islanders were helpless victims.

> Three years ago, a group of evangelists came in and told these people to burn down their spirit house, and destroy their traditional clothes (*pregnant woman, carrying a baby, a small child walks in front of her*). And the destruction was complete. Eventually, the missionaries were asked to leave. But it was too late. Something had been lost forever. More and more the outside world is becoming a reality in their lives.

No direct connection is made between the invasion of the "evangelists" and the coming of the logging company but it is through the juxtaposition of images and inclusion in the discussion of "outside influences" that we consider them related.

This speech is followed by the play presented by Raun Isi Theatre to the village of Gahom about the problems associated with the logging of the forests, underscoring that this is the epitome of the negative influences that the "outside world" has brought. In addition, all three of the groups in this video are seen presenting anti-logging plays. Again, this focus calls attention to the seriousness of the problem.

A simple lesson in political economy is given early on, so that viewers are aware of one of the roots of the problem. The Solomon Islands (as well as the other Melanesian islands) are rich in natural resources, especially minerals and timber, "and this makes them very attractive to overseas interests" (Em I Graun..., Narrator). The unattractiveness of these overseas interests is portrayed, using oppositional images. First, children are seen playing on a beach; a man in a canoe is fishing in the ocean. The opposition is then introduced, as if it is the antagonist in a play. That is, the camera looks up at the big rusty ship, suggesting it is from the perspective of someone in a canoe.

> Narrator voiceover:
> Every two weeks a foreign ship arrives, anchors off the outlying island of Choiseul, the logs are loaded, and the ship departs. The politicians are very keen on this type of development. *Asian man on a truck passes by, a bulldozer is seen in the background.* The problem is, the local communities who own the land are often the last to be consulted. *Logs are loaded onto the ship.*

The problem is threefold according to this passage; not only are overseas interests involved, but local politicians encourage this type of resource exploitation. Moreover, the landowners are not consulted. That the landowners are being exploited seems to be the focus of this video, but it is not only that they are not consulted, but that there seems to be some disputes among each other regarding ownership. A member of Sei! tells in an interview about his experiences on his own home island .

> I was in our village, and I heard chainsaws, bulldozers, and so on. I thought that's in the area of our garden, so I ran to see. When I arrived I saw the man and said, "Hey this is our garden, what are you doing?" The man said, "That's your problem - a man from the next tribe has signed the agreement. *Tree trunk is seen uprooted and lying on its side, another uprooted bush is in the background.* If you want to sort it out - go and see him. We've got work to do. *Bulldozer moves along the beach, a thatched hut is in the background.* (interview in Pidgin, English subtitles)

In this story, information is given that the land is not owned by individuals, but by many people, the entire clan. Moreover, the problem ensues when individuals are approached and agreements are made between these individuals and the logging companies, violating cultural boundaries, and perhaps even crossing legal ones. Though clearly individual Islanders are involved in the selling ("selling out") of clan-owned trees, these individuals are never identified as part of the problem. Rather, the emphasis is that the company is not operating within cultural mores; that there are also certain individuals who are violating their own cultural mores is glossed over.

> Narrator voiceover:
> The people from Luke's village haven't signed any contract. *Big ship is seen.* But company men approach them individually, hoping to gain access to still more trees.

> Luke:
> We don't feel very happy about them. This violates our way of doing things. They must negotiate with the whole tribe, because one person doesn't own land. It belongs to the whole tribe, many people.

Besides complicity, according to the video, part of the problem seems to be a passive sense of fatalism on the part of the villagers. William Takaku metaphorically describes that kind of reaction by the villagers when they were first told about exploitative logging practices.

> People here just dropped on their back on the grass and said *click click* (sound made with tongue in mouth) Unbelieveable, how can men be so unthinking? That's their reaction, they just fall on their back, with the sound of *click click click.*

It is in this realm that the popular theatre seems to be directed, the realm of education, but more importantly, of activating the people, helping them to "retain control over activities in their area" (Em I Graun..., Narrator).

The Theatre Work

Wan Smol Bag in Vanuatu

In the video, the themes of the plays presented to the villagers were all focused on the environment. Sei! and Raun Isi presented plays on logging while Wan Smol Bag's play was unique, and centered around the conservation of an endangered bird species. However, they are also seen performing a logging play for children on their way to the village to which they were assigned to do the endangered species work. The antagonist in this participatory play is a character called Mr. Kill the World.

> Narrator:
> Mr. Kill the World has come with his chain saw, and he's out to grab all he can. At the climax, the children become trees and help the mighty fox save the forest. *Children are chanting a verse as a curse, "pushing" Mr. Kill the World away. They cheer when he is forced out by their voices.*

Other than this short section, the segment describing Wan Smol Bag's work is markedly different from the other two groups. The subtheme in this case is not so much that they have a message to bring to the villagers, but that they have a way to get the villagers involved in solving their own community problems. In this way, in this video, Wan Smol Bag's work was more "alternative" than the others in that it was more participatory; there was no set agenda, but the villagers were allowed to create the play themselves.[1]

Wan Smol Bag was sent by the Department of the Environment to work with the villagers of Kuramambe on the island of Tangoa. They had hoped that a play could be created about the preservation of a local bird species, the koroliko, which live on a small offshore island owned by the Kuramambe people. Sales of the koroliko, which is considered a local delicacy, had provided the Kuramambe people with some cash revenue and the government was concerned that they could not be convinced to create a sanctuary for the bird, even if they were compensated for the scheme. But when Wan Smol Bag found the villagers were in agreement with the Environment Unit, they wondered if they had not come in vain, as the objective of getting the villagers to agree to the sanctuary proposal was no longer an issue. However, a new objective soon revealed itself .

> ... the meeting took an interesting turn when it was revealed that the issue of compensation had opened old wounds with the neighboring village. There was a suspicion that Kuramambe was out to make a fast buck (Narrator).

The problem changed; it was no longer about educating the Kuramambe people, it was about village relations.

A methodology of sorts is revealed in the creation of the play. First of all, there was the discussion of the problem, led by Peter Walker, an expatriate founder of Wan Smol Bag. Once the problem was identified, the theme for the play could also be

[1] See Kidd, for a summary of different kinds of alternative popular theatres, that are categorized according to the degree of participation with which the audience is involved.

identified. The villagers were then asked by Walker for custom stories that may have the same theme -- in this case "it's good to work together" -- that could be used as a "parable ... just like Jesus in the Bible." This parable was found in the history of the village. The people of Kuramambe were not cannibals and the village was regarded as a safe haven for other tribes. The Kuramambe people wanted to use this idea in their play, so that they could bring this message to the neighboring village with whom they were having the dispute. According to Walker, "they wanted to show that they're not trying to make hostility out of this, but they want to see it as a way of uniting the island."

Another part of the "methodology" depicted was the collaborative nature of the play-making process. Wan Smol Bag initiated the work and guided it along, but the villagers were active participants. Because they assumed that the villagers were not familiar with the type of play that they were going to be creating, Wan Smol Bag introduced them to play-making by performing two of their more "raucous" plays. One of the actors is shown inflicted with a bad case of intestinal gas that propels him all around the room, making the corresponding sounds and reacting to the imagined odors. They also did drama games with the villagers; a game of Simon Says is shown, as well as pantomime games and chorus work.

The villagers, who brought in their customs dances to include in the play, were the actors. In addition, some of the villagers helped with the directing. In the video, members of Wan Smol Bag are shown trying to get some of the women to show surprise; then, a village elder took over, and explained the directions to them in their language. Walker stated that this kind of involvement was helpful because these "fledgling directors" not only use local language and ideas in their directions, but the people trust them.

At the "dress rehearsal," an experience of spontaneous creativity occurred with the villagers that seemed to highlight Wan Smol Bag's time in Kuramambe. The narrator's part that they had included for the play wasn't working and this was affecting the actors'

confidence in the play. They decided to put the narrator's speech to music, using a familiar string band song so that everyone could sing it.

> ... it was a moment where you didn't know whether it was going to work, and the next moment everyone is doing this wierd spontaneous dance, everyone got up ... it was wild, it was lovely (Walker).

After three days of work with Wan Smol Bag, the villagers bring their play to the neighboring village. The performance is held at night; torches are lit, the audience sits in front of the "stage." There is a quiet beginning as two men appear on stage and others join them to add musical atmosphere.

> Man 1: Hey - we're on a small island.
> Man 2: What's going to happen? This place is too dark.
> Man 3: *Plays flute.*
> Man 1: What's that? It must be the sound of the bush.
> Man 4: *Blows into conch shell.*
> Man 2: It must be the sound of the sea.
> Man 1: Hey - the koroliko birds are coming.
> (English subtitles)

At this point, the action begins, the actors portraying birds "fly" in in a single line, making cooing sounds, gracefully flapping their "wings." They huddle in a circle, frightened.

> Bird (Man): Hey, don't be frightened. You see all these men here - they're not going to eat us like before. They've made a deal with the Environment Unit.
> Bird (Woman): All these people here - they were the ones eating us before. That one there. That's the one who ate my mother.

And then the issue is raised.

> Bird (Man): Stop all this noise. They're not going to eat us. The people of Kuramambe are going to do very well out of this deal.

Here they are implying that they recognize that this is what their host village is concerned about. At this point, the Kuramambe message is given, as if to say, in response to their worries, "there's nothing to worry about."

Bird (Man) 2: Ah no. He's talking rubbish. It's not only Kuramambe who will do well, everything will be shared and everyone on Tongoa will benefit.
Birds: True?
Bird (Man) 2: Yes. I'll tell you a custom story to show what I mean.

The song and dance that they had spontaneously created the day before is inserted here and the custom story is presented. A man is carried in, wrapped in a mat, and presented to the chief of Kuramambe as a sacrificial gift, but the chief sets him free, illustrating their historical role as a place of refuge.

Chief: I will not kill you in cold blood. You can go free (English subtitles).

A song is sung:

It's the same today. Kuramambe wants to help everyone (English subtitles).

The experience here is that the popular theatre form was used as a means of communication, which seemed to be a neccessary bridge between the two villages because there were some negative feelings of resentment involved. Kuramambe was able to voice its concerns to the neighboring village, that they desired harmony and unity. Walker adds this endnote, although "development" *per se* is never explicitly mentioned in the context of this play:

They want to develop new projects, develop the island together .

Sei! Akson Tim in the Solomons

Though the theme for the plays that Sei! and Raun Isi perform in this video is the same -- the dangers of logging -- the styles of the two logging plays are conspicuously different. While Sei!'s play is light and comical, Raun Isi's is heavy and dramatic. In contrast to Wan Smol Bag's play in this video, the villagers are not the actors or participants in the drama, but Sei! does include local elements in their performance.

In one segment, they are shown rehearsing a musical number. The leader is teaching them the correct way to pronounce a word in the song, telling them that it means

"itchy skin." A Sei! member explains that it is important to include "culture" in the plays. The implication is that it is important to have elements in each performance that are familiar to that particular village.

> Culture is foremost, most important in the Solomons, and other Melanesian countries. We include it so all the rural people will better understand, because if we lose our culture, everything will be gone forever (Pidgin, English subtitles).

The play opens with this itchy skin song, and when they come to the part about itchy skin (the men rhythmically scratching themselves), the audience bursts out in laughter, exemplifying what the Sei! men were explaining about valuing and using local cultural expressions.

The antagonist in the play is a bird, carrying a guitar, named Mr. Savvy Too Much. Mr. Savvy Too Much sings a song and "sweet-talks" to the village people. He promises that he will defecate gold if they will feed him trees. The actors (as villagers) take branches and leaves from a tree and give it to Mr. Savvy Too Much. As they do this, he gives them a can of beer. A fight is depicted as the villagers fight over the last tree.

> Voiceover:
> When people have given him all the trees - there are none left. He no longer shits gold - he shits real shit. *A man smells something, makes a disgusted face, and waves his hand in front of his nose. Mr. Savvy Too Much laughs, jumps up and down.* After Mr. Savvy Too Much has stripped them all naked, he flies away, and people start to realize - in that play - this fellow eats all our trees, gets fat, gets rich, and now he's gone. By this time it's too late.

Shots of the audience are shown here, all with their knuckles on their cheeks, as if they are thinking about the play's message.

An important aspect of Sei!'s work is the organized discussion that occurs after the performance, which the actors do in conjunction with local fieldworkers. These fieldworkers are with the Solomon Islands Development Trust [SIDT], a non-government organization involved in development education. which I will discuss at length in the second part of the essay.

> Village man (or fieldworker): What do you think, all you landowners? What is in your heart after seeing this? Use your heads. Think. Or later you'll cry. That's why I am crying now. Good development is for people to develop themselves. *Man with child.* And that's how it should start - from the bottom up, but not just outsiders taking over.

In the Solomon Islands, Sei! Akson Tim, uses humor, local cultural elements, and discussion, to educate the villagers about various development topics - here it is logging. Such topics have become in greater demand presumably because the threat has increased in recent years.

Raun Isi in Papua New Guinea

If I can be allowed to use a very crude western dichotomy, a convenient analogy can be made to contrast Raun Isi with Sei!. That is, Raun Isi's play is a tragedy while Sei!'s is a comedy. Unlike Sei's opening number about itchy skin which is lively and funny, Raun Isi's is somber and slow-moving. An outdoor screen has been constructed, a large piece of colored material. The villagers are summoned with drumming and melancholy flute-playing. An actor wearing a beard to signify that he is an old man appears, carrying a bag, a spear, and a bow and arrow. He shoots the arrow, hunts with the spear, mimes twisting his catch off the spear, and then puts it in the bag. An actor dressed as a pig appears. *The audience is seen smiling at the pig.* The hunter spears the pig and the pig squeals.

> Old man: In my young days, no one could beat me at hunting games. I'll take you down to the creek and wash you.

This sets up the drama; the old man's young potent days will be juxtaposed with the present time of impotence.

A "bossman" of a logging company, wearing a yellow hardhat and carrying a briefcase, arrives to obtain a signature (x) from the village headman and to buy the villagers off with rice, canned goods, cooking oil, and beer as well as promises of a school,

an aid post, new roads, modern houses, and fresh water supply. One young man is resistant at first, but then succumbs to the bossman's promises.

The next scene appears to be held at night. That wistful flute provides musical accompaniment. A masked actor is shown in a tree; he climbs down and hovers over the young man who is sleeping on the ground. The spirit chants in a quavering, spook-like voice:

> I don't want the logging company to come in here. If the company comes in and cuts down all the bush, where will I find refuge? You must chase them all away. When trees are cut down, they must leave many. If that doesn't happen, I'll kill them all - and I'll make you very sick. I'm warning you!

The tragic events mount. A visitor arrives at the village and sees the destruction; he plays the role of the hero and and narrator, commenting on the events.

> This place has been completely destroyed. No wildlife, no fresh drinking water. No good trees for building houses. Everything is now far, far away. The people should have thought before letting the logging company in. I must go and talk to them about many things.

The visitor witnesses the trouble in the village and functions to put the events into perspective, for the villagers in the play who are actors and the real villagers in the audience.

> Young man: Did you ever give me a penny for the land you sold?
>
> Old man: I did - but you forget. Did you feed your arse or your mouth with all that money?
>
> Young man: Don't talk to me like that! *He hits the old man, they fight and get pulled apart by the other villagers.* You're the one who let the company in. They came in, and look around you now. Look at my brother. I've bloodied his ear because of you. You told us services were coming. The school - where's the school? And the Aid Post - what Aid Post? You're just rubbish.
>
> Visitor: Look - everywhere. Because of land there is fighting and killing. True? In Bougainville they're fighting because of land. In Vanimo now, the bush has been destroyed. All the wildlife has gone. And the tribal landowners are fighting amongst themselves. People are dying, people are being killed because of the land.

Like Sei!'s work, the performance is followed by a discussion. While the play serves to paint a broad picture; the discussion is the time "to offer specific tools" (Narrator). These tools can not be discerned through the video, but has to do with the permit system. Dennis Waliari, introduced as someone who works for the Friends of the Sepik organization, attempts to explain how this system works.

> Once the loggers get a TRP permit, you lose all your land rights to the government. When the Forestry Officer comes you must ask them closely about the TRP system. There are two sides to all this. Everything has two sides.

Takaku reiterates that point, emphasizing theatre's role in development: "Theatre can put up pictures and say. This is what it is, this is the right hand of it, this is the left hand of it. You choose." It is not clear what the "left hand" of it is, as only one side appears to be shown. That side supports the latent mission of the video -- to stop destructive forms of development.

In this video, popular theatre in Melanesia was rendered as a positive modern intervention -- a positive way to influence and educate the villagers who are their target audiences. Though "theatre" or "drama" is part of a Melanesian cultural heritage, this particular educational use by people from outside the home village is modern.

The topic that concerned all the groups in the video had to do with preservation of the environment and the life therein. Deforestation was considered the most serious problem facing these islands, according to this video. The forces behind this destruction were identified; logging companies with the support of the politicians are exploiting the villagers, but some individuals negotiating with the companies are also to blame. The latter is not directly implicated, but the information regarding complicity is contained in the video. Perhaps if individual Islanders are identified as also part of the problem, there would be more success with the mission of saving the forests.

The visual narrative contained in the video was that of the tension between the traditional and the modern, the foreign and the indigenous. The message is that in the end,

it is the blend of elements, discerning the positive from the destructive, that will lead to long-term survival. Popular theatre, as depicted in this video, represents this blend of elements.

Filmmakers, even documentary filmmakers, are artists, for they are able to edit, to choose images and sounds, build them around a certain significant theme, and do so in such a way that is aesthetically pleasing. The filmmakers of Em I Graun Blong Yumi were successful in doing just that and for a good purpose -- to convince others that there is a logging problem in Melanesia, and that there are some theatre groups trying to educate people about this problem. The film presents one side, one version, one lens through which to understand the role and significance of popular theatre in development in Melanesia. The second part of the essay will provide another lens. The additional information obtained through library research in the Hamilton Library Pacific Collection and material generously provided by Vilsoni Hereniko, John Roughan, Peter Walker, and Dennis Carroll, added to my knowledge of the role of popular theatre. When all this is taken into account, the clear focus provided by the video becomes blurred, but the refocusing exercise makes possible a fuller understanding.

PART TWO

The Popular Theatre Movement in Melanesia

The popular theatre activity in Melanesia has only recently included enough participants to reasonably be termed a regional movement. In 1993 alone, there have been several interesting reports of new theatre activity that can be termed "popular" or "people's theatre" in different parts of Melanesia. In June, a play proposing a solution for peace in troubled Bougainville, was produced by theatre students from the University of Papua New Guinea (Kepson 1993). Also in June, in the Guadalcanal province of the Solomon Islands, the formation of a theatre group which would promote awareness of health, environment, and other social issues, was announced ("G-Province..." 1993: 7). Also in the Solomon Islands this year, the Catholic Church has begun to use theatre to educate the Islanders about their own history (Craddock 1993). Though no causal relationships can be made between these recent developments and the work of the already established groups such as those depicted in the video, there seems to be an increasing recognition that this is an exciting medium of communication and education.

But terms such as communication and education in the context of "development" are suspect. Development has come to be synonymous with neo-colonialism and exploitation. This cautious attitude towards development is epitomized by William Takaku's statement in the video Em I Graun Blong Yumi:

> Development. It's frightening. ... We know that sooner or later, by extracting all these minerals, oil, and everything, it's like sucking the blood out of onefellow's body. ...

If communication, education, and theatre are linked with that word "development," then are all of these activities suspect as well? Of course there are different kinds of development, therefore, the purpose of this section of the paper is to attempt to discern what kind of "development" these different theatres foster.

I will start by providing additional information about popular theatre in Melanesia that is not found in the video. I will put this in a historical framework by tracing the development of popular theatre in Melanesia from its tentative beginnings in the mid-70s to its growing popularity today, as attested to by the items mentioned in the previous paragraph as well as by the video, Em I Graun Blong Yumi. This information will give a fuller picture of the popular theatre movement in Melanesia. Within this historical exercise, I will examine the development issues that the theatre groups have faced, such as issues of national and cultural identity, the matter of funding, and the issue of aesthetics. By discussing these issues, and by comparing these groups with each other and with similar activities in other parts of the world, I will be able to link these theatre groups with the kind of development that they seem to be promoting, whether state-centered, people-centered, or otherwise. Because some theatre activity is more people-centered than others, it is my hope that these will serve as models for similar theatrical activities in the Pacific and elsewhere, for groups interested in that type of development.

Definitions

As indicated by the variety of plays referred to in the above paragraph and in the video, the parameters of what constitutes "popular theatre" are wide-ranging. Writers who have studied the popular theatre movement in the Third World have attempted to frame it for study by giving it a definition, and in so doing they limit the discussion of much of the theatre activity. For my purposes, popular theatre is defined as broadly as possible so that the work can be studied in a development framework -- what kind of development do they promote? -- rather than on the basis of whether or not they qualify as "genuine" popular theatre.

Generally, the groups are considered popular theatre if the focus is on audience reception rather than on playwright or director expression. Their primary audiences are the

"people," the masses of people at the bottom part of the socio-economic pyramid, rather than the few elite who occupy the top. Though the groups may do other things, for example, tour in different countries or perform for tourists, the core of their work is for "the people."

Also, the word "theatre" is cumbersome, because an important characteristic of these groups is that they do not use a western-style indoor theatre structure, with proscenium arch, curtains, and the like. However, because all the groups use that term to identify themselves, I will likewise follow suit. The word "theatre" then, refers to the group of people who do drama; popular theatre is drama for the "people."

The Theatrical Heritage in Melanesia

Drama and theatrical elements are evident in the traditions of cultures throughout the Pacific. In Papua New Guinea, with its many diverse and expressive cultures, theatrical components, such as make-up, body painting, tattoos, personal ornament, and dance drama, abound. In addition, clowning is a widespread practice (Beier 1971: vii). The ritual performance of the Umeda people as seen in the film, The Red Bowmen, has been classified as more an example of theatre rather than of dance because of the dramatization of a clear narrative storyline -- a metaphor for the development of culture from a wild cassowary, through many animal phases, to a bowman -- involved in the performance (Kaeppler 1991). Powell describes other dance dramas that have a narrative structure, such as a "long, intricately stylised ballet about some sparrows whose young are attacked by a hawk" (Powell 1978: 56) performed by the Binadere people at the first Niugini Arts Festival in 1971.

In the Solomon Islands, Campbell Smith, a Canadian CUSO (Canadian University Service Overseas) volunteer who was the original coordinator of Sei!, says of the

theatrical talents of Solomon Islanders, they "are by no means theatrical naifs" (Smith 1992: 140).

> Skits are often performed at custom feasts ridiculing rigorously held taboos -- custom, religion and sex. And many of the traditional dances are intrinsically dramatic, illustrating the movements of birds and sharks, of planting and harvesting, and of war (Smith 1992: 140).

With so much evidence of traditional practices, many still extant, "theatre" -- especially in this non-written form -- can not be determined to be a western import. Rather, in modern times, what was different for the islanders was theatre as a literary, that is, written expression and also the non-ritualistic educational use of drama by people from outside the home village.

Theatre and the Development of Written Literature

Papua New Guinea is considered to have the "most established field of theatrical production" in the South Pacific (Stella 1992: 181). The number of written plays that have been recorded is profuse. Lutton's bibliographic work contains 123 entries from 1967 to 1974 alone.

The initial development of western-style theatre (playwright-centered) in this country is linked to the literary explosion that occurred during the years surrounding the country's independence. The concerns of decolonization, such as political or cultural conflicts, provided much inspiration for newly-educated writers schooled at the University of Papua New Guinea (Beier: viii). Most of these writers were students of Ulli Beier, a European expatriate who is credited with encouraging and inspiring the literary arts during this era (Powell 1978: 38). The plays that were produced at this time was writing-centered. The emphasis was on self-discovery through the writing of plays and skits (Beier 1971: ix), rather than the conscious use of theatre to "bring about or reinforce a process of

social change; changes in (the) self-concept, attitude, awareness, skill, or behaviour" of the audience (Kidd: 2).

Though elements of traditional theatre forms were included in the written plays and helped to typify a unique form of contemporary Papua New Guinea English-langauge (with some pidgin) theatre, this theatrical heritage influenced the playwrights "only to a slight extent," according to Powell.

> It is as if the playwrights saw little connection between the two worlds of written, European-style drama, and oral, Papua New Guinean dramatic ritual. The singsings, the wedding, funeral, or initiation ceremonies, the dance-drama that do appear in the plays appear more as decorations or illustrations than as things integral to the conception of the work (70).

This is not surprising as these educated elite, by becoming "educated," were cut off from village life, and all the rituals and ceremonies that may have been a part of that. But even in the villages, culture was not static.

> The old rituals - especially those associated with birth, initiation, marriage, and death, have to a greater or lesser extent been superseded by Christian rituals (ibid: 64).

However, there was a non-ceremonial type of folk theatre that "though ancient in origin, is still very much alive" (ibid: 74). According to Powell, there are two categories of this type of extant folk play:

> those which are essentially documentary in character and which enact a story from myth or history with some degree of seriousness; and farcical plays on everyday themes in which people who are peculiar in some way invite laughter (72).

Though the playwrights do not, in her study, acknowledge this heritage as a major influence, Powell claims that these types of folk plays are apparent in much of the "new" Papua New Guinea plays, such as The Sun and Cargo, both by Arthur Jawodimbari (ibid: 73).

We have seen that this playwright-centered theatre is considered a modern form of theatre in Papua New Guinea. At the time of Powell's writing, performance aspects derived from ceremonial or ritual traditions are used in these plays, but in a decorative fashion. This new drama is more influenced by the non-ceremonial type of drama than the ceremonial type in that the plays have similar content, based on myth, history, and farce. But popular theatre is even more clearly derived from the non-ceremonial type of folk play than is the written drama. This is evident not only in that the latter is a written form while traditional folk drama is an oral tradition, but also in that folk plays and popular theatre share the same people-centered *raison d`etre*. This is not to say that the writers are self-indulgent or individualistic. Most Third World writers do share a concern for their country, their people, and their community, however, the focus of this type of theatre is on the writer, the writing, and the performance of the written play, rather than on the needs of the audience as expressed by the people themselves.

National vs. Popular Theatre in Papua New Guinea

In practice, however, the distinctions between the kinds of theatre as either "popular" or "new written drama," or between people's theatre and state-directed theatre become blurred. For example, plays written by noted playwrights Nora Vagi-Brash and John Kasaipwalova were taken to the people in the villages by the National Theatre Company (de Guzman-Alaluku 1979: 14), a government entity. Having had its first tour in 1974, the National Theatre Company (NTC) was the first one of several theatre groups now sponsored by the national government.

Can a national theatre be a "people's theatre"? The repressive examples of government-sponsored arts in the Third World in the post-colonial era makes one skeptical. Mlama, writing about the African case, finds that theatre has been used as a tool to maintain the status quo, just as the colonial masters prior to independence had done.

But now the status quo has become the indigenous national government. Governments have been accused of "co-opting the arts," citing airport or state banquet dances as examples of this.

> In the guise of promoting national cultural identities, the arts have been turned into political mouthpieces of government or party policies, exhorting people to abide by government plans and to be grateful to the leaders for their independence and whatever development has come their way. (Mlama 1991: 15).

Are the government-sponsored theatres in Papua New Guinea similar in function to the African cases? Are these Papua New Guinean national theatres doing anything for the people besides placating them with entertainment, or subduing their unrest, as in the African case, according to Mlama?

Epskamp portrays the government's role in theatre and the arts less malevolently. He suggests that national theatre, especially in young, culturally diverse states, can benefit the public interest, and thus be both national and popular. Using Raun Raun Theatre as an example, he writes:

> In young, politically autonomous and independent states where recently a change in politics and ideology has taken place, the government may seek a clear set of characteristics of the cultural image (national identity) at home and abroad on the one hand, while on the other hand the population may feel the need to determine its cultural identity or identities in this new situation (Epskamp c1989: 64).

This has been the policy of the Papua New Guinea government. As an arm of the National Cultural Council, the mission of the National Theatre Company was primarily one of identity-building for nation-building. Upon its inception, one of the major objectives of the Council was to promote the emergence of a Papua New Guinea identity. The director of Cultural Affairs at the time, John Haugie, wrote:

> An important major objective of the Council is to help the emergence of a Papua New Guinea identity. This means creating an awareness of cultural heritage and the ways in which, because of this heritage, Papua New Guineans differ from the citizens of other countries. It means fostering a pride in being a Papua New Guinean and reinforcing confidence that the culture and life style of Papua

> New Guinea is *as rich as* (ital. mine) that of any other country (Haugie 1977: 11).

The tone of his statement reflects the need to prove oneself, not unlike a younger sibling wanting to prove to be as capable as an older, more experienced sibling.

Theatre was an important aspect of this identity project, especially during the early years of independence. Based at the National Arts School in the capital of Port Moresby where they gave regular performances, the National Theatre Company was also a touring company, travelling throughout the country -- "taking the arts to the people" (de Guzman-Alaluku 1979:15) -- and internationally as well. Therefore, the National Theatre Company functioned to present a cultural image both at home and abroad, to themselves and to others.

Identity-building was clearly a central aim of the National Theatre Company in those early years. Former director of the National Theatre Company Arthur Jawodimbari is quoted in 1979, stating:

> The National Theatre Company is about our people, our community and our heritage, and wants to return to the people a reflection in dramatic form of themselves and of a developing nation (ibid: 14).

The material with which they built their performances and perpetuated their cultural identity was eclectic. It included music and dance from all over the country. Village elders were invited to live with the company in the National Arts School campus in Waigani and taught the company members the village dances, the use of traditional musical instruments, costume-making, and how to put on body decorations. The performances of the National Theatre Company also included modern elements, such as scripted plays. A typical toured performance included plays, dances, musical revues, and puppet shows.

The content of the performances was also wide-ranging. Jawodimbari said that the aims of the National Theatre were to be more than to entertain or to retell legends, but to

be an educational tool. Stating, "we like to make people laugh but we also want to put across some message," Jawodimbari suggests both entertainment and education were their objectives (ibid: 15).

A New Direction for the NTC

By the mid-80s, the philosophical base of the National Theatre Company changed. There was a sense that it could do more than promote cultural heritage. Takaku, at that time the acting director, explains:

> National Theatre for too long, had been kept here as an institution for fostering our cultural heritage of Papua New Guinea. Our aim or direction now, is to make the National Theatre a tool ... to carry out awareness to the people ... (Takaku c1985: 1).

In 1986, a new theatre structure was proposed that would decentralize the National Theatre Company and instead of a central theatre based in the capital, there were plans to establish theatres for each language group in the provinces (ibid: 4). Decentralizing the national theatre was an important aspect of the main goal of bringing "awareness" to the people in the provinces, a way to get closer to the people, "before we drift further and further away from ourselves ..." (ibid: 2). A national theatre company that was based in the capital city and that only visited the provinces occasionally would not achieve the "awareness" goals that the new national theatre hoped for. Rather, provincial companies would need to be established.

> When we are at our place, then we can have a choice, either to play this destructive game called DEVELOPMENT, or to find a new direction ... (ibid: 2).

The leaders of the National Theatre at this time were not only planning to stimulate the growth of many theatres throughout the nineteen provinces, but they were to bring "awareness" to these places. The awareness included a criticism of development, which may also have meant a criticism of the government.

Here is where the distinction between national and popular theatre becomes relevant. Does the work of the national theatre benefit the people in general, or is it a co-optation of the arts meant to strengthen the power of the government, as Mlama might suggest? Is there at least, a reason to question that there may be conflicts between what the theatres, as a voice of the people, want to say and what the government thinks is appropriate?

Rodney Kove, the artistic director of the Company at the time of this campaign, was to take the awareness campaign to the Oro Province, his home province. He was aware of the conflict inherent in the project when he wrote:

> ... Some parts of our task will be sensitive. We must understand that we are getting support from the National Government financially for this pilot project and it is the same government that implements this present living condition. Here we have to be mindful in our approach. Anything we say/do in our awareness campaign must not suggest we are working against the present government (Kove c1985: 6-7).

The challenge seemed to be to bring "awareness" to the people without offending the government. In the publication that announced the awareness campaign, You Are There and We Are Here, the writers explained what that awareness entailed. The myths and legends were dramatized as before, but now the dramatization had another purpose besides cultural preservation; drama was also to be used to "produce an awareness" (Takaku 1985: 9). As Kove writes:

> ... our duty is to go out there to help revitalise our lost ancestral cultural activities through dramatic art which will create an insight for both our leaders and people to detect the problems related to social and cultural values (6).

What exactly were the problems that the awareness campaign was to bring to light? The writers, Takaku and Kove, express a dismay over some of the problems, mostly urban, that the country was facing. Kove lists his "priority messages" as: difficulties of life in towns; excessive drinking; rascalism; and conflicts from different religious groups

(Kove 1985: 6). Takaku mentions the problems of youth, unemployment, and drop-outs, as part of a bigger problem -- development that apparently results in a dependency on a cash economy.

> Many Papua New Guineans are overwhelmed by the material attractions of the towns and cities ... we are blindly getting ourselves lost into the system of greed, or ignorance, of "I" want this and "I" want that. Our own system of 'sharing' is disappearing in our own midst, our original independence is being taken away from us and is being replaced by dependency upon a few people's material (money) wealth (1985: 2).

The awareness campaign, through theatre, would educate people about development and hopefully empower them in some way.

> Our cultural awareness through theatre performances, would slowly make our people aware of the whole situation, calmly opening the possibilities in their minds, of a complete change of direction and outlook that could relate to our own ways of life (ibid).

Evidently, the National Theatre Company proceeded with their plans to bring "awareness" to the people, as is indicated by Raun Isi's anti-logging play in the video, Em I Graun Blong Yumi, which was produced in 1992. In fact, Takaku's goals remain constant. In the video, he talks about using the national theatre as a tool, just as he did in 1986.

> The dream of developing a national theatre, that's my dream, the biggest modern dream I have for Papua New Guinea. That is to establish a theatre that becomes a tool, for this kind of work, for awareness, in the provinces so that traditional singsing groups get promoted by it, traditional legends are dramatized through it (Em I Graun ...).

The players in this funding drama are cautiously pragmatic -- careful not to accuse the government, their sole financial support, of any wrong-doing but attempting to find ways to empower people to protect their land and interests that are not neccessarily anti-government. For example, the video showed how the theatre, with the help of a non-government organization, Friends of the Sepik, encouraged the landowners to question the forestry officer about land rights and the permit process.

Takaku did say that the change would take place slowly, by "calmly opening the possibilities..." It is in this cautious way perhaps, that the national theatre has managed to become more people-centered over time, and still remain sponsored by the government.

A Traveling Theatre: Raun Raun

Like the National Theatre Company, the history of the Raun Raun Theatre provides us with an interesting discussion of the issues of what characterizes "popular" theatre. Included in their work are innovative cultural identity projects as well as straightforward development education projects. Greg Murphy, the Australian expatriate who founded Raun Raun, has described this theatre as a "Third World popular theatre group" (Smyth 1983). The dual-faceted work that this theatre group developed exemplifies what he means by this phrase.

Murphy was a lecturer in drama at the Goroka Teacher's College in 1975 when he conceived of the idea of a traveling theatre that would bring drama to the people, not imported drama, but plays with "some of the dramatic and amusing fare from their own history - in a language they could understand" (Crichton 1978: 63), namely Pidgin. Another objective was to become a full-time drama school. He received a small grant from the National Cultural Council with which a theatre truck was purchased with some additional help from the Goroka Rotary Club. Provincial government authorities provided housing and office space for the director and the drama students, who were originally selected from among Murphy's students.

At its inception, the theatre was to travel with Maket Raun, a decentralization effort that was to take public services, private sector activities, and entertainment to the villages. But Raun Raun traveled on its own most of the time, taking advantage of the village network system proposed by the Maket Raun feasibility study and meeting up with Market Raun when it could. The road system that radiated outwards from Goroka into the

other provinces in the highlands was ideal for Raun Raun's purposes. Also, centers for village entertainment called *haus singsing* made out of bush materials had "mushroomed" in the Kainantu area in recent years. Besides the village centers, they also played at markets and schools (Murphy 1981b: 50). Raun Raun's name is derived from these three concepts: pidgin for traveling around, the theatre in the round structure of the *haus singsing*, and the association with Maket Raun (Crichton 1978: 63).

In 1978, three years after its meager beginnings, Raun Raun was given the status of a National Cultural Institution by the National Cultural Council, becoming a "fully funded Statutory Authority." According to Murphy this "healthy patronage" did not mean a "stifling of freedom as it so often does" (Murphy 1981a: 5), but Raun Raun was free to direct its own course.

Raun Raun went to the people; this was one of their founding principles -- "to take entertainment to village people in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea and an area totalling six provinces of the country" (Murphy 1976: not paginated). Yet, the fact that rural people are their audiences does not necessarily mean it is a good thing for those people in general. In order to assess the benefits to the people, the content and nature of the plays will need to be discussed.

Murphy, writing about Raun Raun, has consciously delineated this theatre's dual nature, having two main performance objectives. First of all, Raun Raun has become well-known internationally and regionally for its folk operas -- "an attempt to work with Papua New Guinea traditions of story, song and dance in terms of modern stage concepts of space and time ..." (Murphy 1981b: 52). The other type of performance is the village play which has a more didactic, educational nature than the folk opera (Murphy 1981a: 7) and are performed to address basic village issues such as water, health, and transport problems. It may be convenient to say that the folk opera form, which has been called the "more sophisticated entertainment for urban and international audiences" (Smyth 1983), is not popular theatre, while the village plays are. However, Murphy considered both types

of plays popular theatre, drawing on different theoretical frameworks to make that claim. Later, defending the folk opera form against critics, he even argued that the folk opera fits the "popular" genre better than the village plays (1988: 12-14).

The village plays that were part of Raun Raun's repertoire were based on traditional clowning and moral plays that were still practiced in the villages at *singsings*. Clowns representing the problem, spirit figures representing the ideal, and string band music, were theatrical elements that were already present in the villages. What Raun Raun did was to combine the existing elements, creating a basic structure from which the content could be varied, depending on the particular purposes of the event (Murphy 1976: not paginated).

The first village plays were based on contemporary situations, such as alcoholism, gambling, urban drift, and unemployment in the city that were social concerns of the population in general, but presented in an entertaining and very humorous fashion (ibid). For example, Poket Buruk is a play about an alcoholic father/husband who cannot support his starving family. It is resolved when the family wins the "Find-the-Ball" competition and the man ends up in jail with his prostitute girlfriend. Within this simple story, are the spirit and clown figures:

> The spirit figure in the play represents what is refined, progressive and idealistic, the "Melanesian Way"; he introduces the play and comments throughout on the action. The clowns represent what is crude, conservative, and realistic, and they weave themselves into the main plot (ibid).

The inspiration for the first village plays came from the experiences and observations of the actors themselves about contemporary life in Papua New Guinea (ibid). The content of the village plays changed with the infusion of funds for development efforts, such as education, about nutrition, coffee, family planning, and water supply. In 1978, the Eastern Highlands Provincial Government sponsored Raun Raun's first development-oriented village play, a production on the themes of malnutrition, scabies,

diarrhea, and venereal disease, known as the Nutrition Play, *Kain Sik Nogut*, thus initiating the Popular Theatre Campaign, which was based on similar work of a theatre group in Botswana in Africa, called Laedza Batanani (Murphy 1981a: 5). The structure of the plays, using clowns and spirit figures, that had been established for the village plays fit in nicely with the development plays, for example:

> There were nurses and a peanut *masalai* (spirit) who delivered the message, the melodramatic situation of the good family and bad family, clowns who restated the themes in comic terms, and masks of dogs, pigs, and scabies bugs (Murphy 1981b: 56).

In 1988, Murphy criticized this kind of work, drawing on similar criticisms of this theatre for development work in Africa.

> Raun Raun Theatre in Papua New Guinea has done some educational theatre of this kind with plays on nutrition, family planning, water supplies and law and order. ... The danger with the use of theatre in this way is that it is susceptible to propaganda and poltical manipulation (Murphy 1988: 12).

For these reasons, according to Murphy, the folk opera form is closer to "genuine" popular theatre than the theatre for development type of village plays. Drawing from Bertolt Brecht, the preeminent German director/playwright/theorist, Murphy defines "popular" as "intelligible to the broad masses, *taking over* (ital. mine) their forms of expression and enriching them, adopting and consolidating their standpoint ... linking with tradition and carrying it further" (Brecht quoted in Murphy 1981b: 52).[1] Like Brecht, Murphy puts forth the argument that aside from being a social art that can be used to raise the consciousness of its audience, theatre is also concerned with the "interplay between the creative, imaginative, and humanizing tendencies that is the preoccupation of all art" (Murphy 1988: 14).

[1] Brecht's influence in the Third World in decolonization efforts by indigenous theatre groups to raise the consciousness of the masses is widespread, so it is not surprising that he should be quoted for the Papua New Guinea context.

The folk operas were certainly creative and imaginative, and did *take over* the indigenous forms of expression. Linking with tradition, Raun Raun carried theatre into the present to reflect contemporary concerns. Their first folk operas did not claim to be more than a dramatization of some legends, woven together with songs and dances, mostly from the Siassi Islands. The favored type of legend for the first folk operas were creation myths, "since those bear the most historical, philosophical and psychological weight" (Murphy 1981: 4). The Legend of Jari, an early folk opera based on a creation story from the Sepik, about the life of Jari, goddess of love and marriage, toured the United States in 1978.

The allegorical nature of their work occurred early in Raun Raun's development. A dance-drama, Nema Namba, with a theme that was an allegory for independence, was created for the September independence celebrations. The climax occurs when two birds of paradise fight each other -- "one representing the forces of chaos and evil who is supplanted by the other representing order and social harmony" (Murphy 1977: 13). Nema Namba was based loosely on a poem written by Henginike Riyong as well as an anthropological work, by R.F. Salisbury, Gods, Ghosts, and Men in Melanesia (Murphy 1977: 13, 16), which attests to the manifold nature of Raun Raun's creative process.

The penchant for origin stories as well as the allegorical nature of Raun Raun's work, eventually came together. The mature style of the folk opera began to crystallize in 1979 with the creation of Sail the Midnight Sun, the first of what was to become the Niugini Niugini trilogy. It was also the first time a well-known writer, John Kasaipwalova, had been involved in Raun Raun's work. In late 1979, he sent a copy of his epic poem of the same name, written in English, to Raun Raun. It was dramatized by Raun Raun with Kasaipwalova collaborating, became a five-part folk opera, and taken to the Festival of the Arts that was held in Port Moresby in 1980.

Based on a story from the Trobriand Islands, Kasaipwalova's home, Sail the Midnight Sun also integrated a Trobriand traditional dance drama called the *kesawaga*. The *kesawaga* proved to be an exciting device for Raun Raun, a traditional vehicle that

would carry modern messages. It takes a single image, or object, or animal, and makes from it philosophical generalizations about Trobriands life (Murphy 1981b: 54). For example, a dugong *kesawaga* explained that large things can be captured by simple means, while a garden spider *kesawaga* showed that small things can achieve much if they work hard (Murphy 1981a: 16).

A *kesawaga* in Sail the Midnight Sun was the image of the main character Niugini, in a canoe with his steering oar, which was a comment on the need for balance in life. But it was a new kind of *kesawaga*; rather than having meaning only for Trobriands society, it was meant to be meaningful to Papua New Guinea in general. The balance also referred to an aspect of modern Papua New Guinea philosophy called "the Melanesian Way" of which an important component is the balance of opposites (Murphy 1981b: 17). [1]

The play itself was an allegory for Papua New Guinea history and identity, its five acts representing the different eras and various aspects of identity. The first act tells of the birth or the origins of Papua New Guinea, symbolized by the birth of the main character, Niugini, who is born from a union between the sky and the sea. Next, the colonial period is depicted as a period of growth, but Niugini "soon wearies of providing fulfillment for other people and begins sickening for something more" (ibid). Thus he begins his journey on his canoe, a symbol for the struggle for independence, which is the third act. The fourth act, Niugini's marriage, represents Papua New Guinea's independence; "it is a happy time for five years" but then trouble brews, and independence -- "marriage" -- is not the ideal condition after all. The last act shows him lost, in the "reality of independence" again in his canoe, trying to steer his way, battling with the seas, the sharks, and the spirits.

The folk operas, which toured both nationally and internationally, received very positive reviews, especially in the foreign press. Upon seeing Sail the Midnight Sun at the Sixth Asian Arts festival in 1981, a Hong Kong reviewer praised the performance, writing:

[1] It is interesting to note that this "balance of opposites", or depicting the tension between opposites is also shown in the video, Em I Graun Blong Yumi. Maybe it is a coincidence, but it may have something to do with the concept of "The Melanesian Way."

> If this kind of creativity is typical of the New Guinea theatre community it is working from a healthy and viable approach in a world-aware fashion (Weber 1981).

But what kind of impact did it have at home? What kind of development did it promote? Was it more a creative exercise on the part of the company with little concern for the good of Papua New Guineans or was this concern always and foremost on the minds of the creators?

Murphy goes to great lengths to offer credence that Raun Raun is "genuine" popular theatre, and is therefore, people-centered, concerned with the contemporary concerns of the people, rather than with romantically preserving traditional culture. In the mid to late 80s, there was a debate between the directors of the National Theatre Company and Murphy, director of Raun Raun. This debate was similar to one prominent in the early 70s about different aproaches to cultural development. That is, should the objective of cultural arts be to "preserve" traditional culture, or to "transform" it? John Kasaipwalova advocated for the latter:

> The most obvious qualitative difference between the "reconstructed culture" and the continuous transformation of the present which I am advocating, is that the former strives to achieve a fallacious perfect state, while the latter engages human creativity, without goals and values already defined and set by cultural custodians (quoted in Murphy 1988: 3).

The conflict between the National Theatre Company and Raun Raun in the late 80s reflects the same debate between the preservationists and transformationists in the early 70s. Murphy claims that the directors of the National Theatre Company reflect the ideas of the preservationists, especially in their move to disband, or at least decentralize, the national theatre in favor of local, provincial theatres. Murphy seemed to be offended by Takaku's statements, such as: "each of our heritage must develop at its own place and not mixed around" (ibid: 4). And again when Takaku wrote:

> Taking bits from Morobe culture and mixing it with Trobriand legend in the name of Contemporary Arts, performances or otherwise, should not be how we preserve our culture (ibid).

Murphy's interpretation is that this move to localize the National Theatre Company is a regressive move to the romantic lifestyle of the past. Raun Raun, he says, represents a transformationist philosophy, drawing from the past to create new cultural forms that reflect contemporary Papua New Guinea situations and serve the people's needs in today's world.

Mainly, the purpose that such a theatre serves, is to unify the Papua New Guinea people. One of the methods by which Raun Raun attempts to achieve this is to find commonalities between the cultures, culture codes that can be understood by the different cultures of Papua New Guinea. For example, John Kasaipwalova related the specific cultural codes from the Trobriands to coding that is "common multi-culturally in Papua New Guinea; not a collage, but a regrowth" (ibid: 7). Studying various Papua New Guinea symbols and stories, Murphy claims to have found some common themes, such as the wanderer-innovator culture hero, the tragic lover, the witch, the power of dreams, and the balance between various oppositions found in nature and life, such as night and day, man and woman (ibid).

Drawing from Victor Turner's theories about theatre as ritual communication, Murphy justifies Raun Raun's methods by claiming their perfomances evoke an empowering feeling of "communitas" which is "an essential and generic human bond." It is because of the use of the "dominant symbols" found throughout Papua New Guinea that this feeling of "communitas" is created (ibid: 10).

Furthermore, Murphy claims that Raun Raun is "genuine" popular theatre for the following reasons: its themes "penetrate" to the people's real interests; it is usually mobile and seeks out its audiences; it is within the economic means of the people; it uses the language of the people; it is technically simple; its philosophy is usually democratic so its work is often produced collectively; it is often unscripted and therefore uses improvisation

to create its material (ibid: 15). Finally, he provides a quote by Adolfo Vasquez meant to be the *coup de grace*, supporting the idea that popular art should also be universal.

> All truly popular art opens and enriches a profound vein of humanity. To make art for the people is to make universal art, to plunge into the particular - national and popular - human essence and emerge with universality (ibid: 16).

Besides this scholarly validation, there was also government approval of the theatre's work. In 1976, a year after its inception, his report describes a congratulatory letter from the National Cultural Council as "no better tribute" (Murphy 1976: not paginated). In an interview in 1984, Murphy again uses acceptance by "key people" as a form of validation.

> I have established a lot of good relations with people in PNG. Mr. Somare is a close friend of the company and there are other important politicians (Andrews 1984).

Being designated a National Cultural Institution by the National Cultural Council was another form of validation, but does this necessarily mean that Raun Raun's theatre is for the "people"? That is, the government does not always have the people's best interests in mind. It is in the government's interests to unify the people, to give them a sense of shared identity; this is seen as an important aspect of national development. This "identity-building" has been assumed to be beneficial to the people. I will attempt to argue why this assumption needs to be questioned in the following section.

Murphy had ample support to make a claim that Raun Raun was "genuine" popular theatre. But because he is biased, some other means will need to be found to make this determination.

To begin with, the claim to be a unifying force has come to be suspect in the light of postmodern theory. Rather than a positive effect, postmodernists see attempts at universalizing as oppressive. As Silberman explains:

> Indeed, any appeal to universal values is considered tainted by a will to totality and thus becomes suspect as totalitarian, if not Stalinist. The conscious and planned management of the process of social reproduction leads to administrative domination and efficiency, masking a network of oppressive power relations (1993: 9).

This confict between the local and the universal is played out on the Papua New Guinea scene in many situations. For example, the recent film Black Harvest by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, depicts the resolution of tribal rivalries taking precedence over the coffee harvest, leading to the eventual downfall of the plantation, the success of which is conventionally considered good for the country and the people.

The conflict in Bougainville also justifies the exercise of questioning whether or not universalizing goals really serve the best interests of the people. In fact, a Bougainville theatre group who did not share this ideology was silenced by the government. Sei!'s Campbell Smith spoke to a member of the Sunkamap Theatre on Bougainville, when Sei! visited Papua New Guinea in 1989. When asked what the Sunkamap Theatre hoped to achieve, he said: "We want to make people understand that too much foreign influence can spoil our culture" (Smith 1992: 149). This member revealed that they were forced to halt its operations when they were suspected of being sympathetic to the rebels. Like the rebels, the theatre was critical of conventional development.

If the insurgents in Bougainville had believed in these goals of national unity, perhaps the acts towards revolution would not have occurred. But the problems, the injustices, the environmental damage, would have continued, and would have festered. Popular theatre is ideal in situations where people need to be empowered and educated because of encroaching, unwelcome development. Sankamap attempted this approach, but was subsequently silenced. Rather than presenting images of unity and sameness, Sankamap may have challenged people and the government to recognize that there is, in reality, disunity and dissonance in their everyday problems. If development were people-centered, theatre could be a means by which people could confront these everyday

problems and discuss productive ways to solve them, rather than have to resort to violence and experience the tragic consequences as a result.

Assertion of individual or local rights, dignity, and identity are important and crucial, but to stop there is also problematic. Separate culture projects do not accurately reflect reality. We live in an intercultural world, both within one nation and internationally. The dangers of the promotion of individual cultures as superior to others is evident in today's world climate and exemplified by the violence and massacres evoked by "ethnic cleansing" fanaticism. The coup in Fiji and its repressive after-effects, for example, the loss of rights and dignity of the Indo-Fijian people, is a manifestation of the assertion of racial superiority by the Fijian men in power.

This is the dilemma: there is the preservation and perpetuation of different cultures and races on the one hand, and on the other hand, there is the need for these different groups to live together in peace, within their lands, as well as internationally.

Is there room for both kinds of projects? I believe so, in fact, this dilemma can be a "productive moment" (Silberman 1993: 11) inherent in all confrontations between opposing ideas. A relatively new movement in international theatre called interculturalism attempts to embrace this confrontation as part of its schema. Richard Schechner, a prominent contemporary American director and theoretician, articulates what is meant by this term:

> ... interculturalists probe the confrontations, ambivalences, disruptions, fears, disturbances and difficulties when and where cultures collide, overlap,or pull away from each other. Interculturalists explore misunderstandings, broken messages and failed translations - what is not pure and what cannot successfully fuse. These are seen not as disasters but as fertile rifts of creative possibilities (1991: 30).

Schechner's article differentiates between multicultural and fusion forms of expression, which are found worldwide. Multiculturalism is the promotion of separate cultures, while fusion, its opposite, occurs when "elements of two or more cultures mix to

such a degree that a new society, language or genre of art emerges" (ibid). Takaku's idea of many provincial theatres reflects a desire to promote multiculturalism, while Murphy's "transformationalist" ideas promote fusion. Schechner does not vilify one or the other, nor say that interculturalism is better, rather they are all part of a process of cultures coming in contact with each other.

> Where multiculturalism falters, where fusion does not occur, interculturalism happens. Just as mountains rise where continents collide, and deep ocean basins form where they pull apart, so new arts, behaviors and human interactions are negotiated at the interfaces and faults connecting and separating cultures (30).

How was this conflict between multiculturalism and fusion negotiated in Papua New Guinea? One clue is that Murphy is no longer involved with Raun Raun. There had been conflicts with others for many years before the 1988 debate, having to do with his position as a white director of an indigenous company, not among his company members but "resentment surfaced in relation to his position in other quarters" (Andrews 1984). A newspaper article reported that he was to leave the company in June 1984 when his position was to have been "in the local bureaucratic jargon, "localised" " (Smyth 1983). Therefore, it appears that the preservation of separate cultures (multiculturalism) is the policy direction currently being promoted by the cultural bureaucrats in Papua New Guinea.[1]

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[1]The popular theatre movement in Papua New Guinea also includes other groups besides the National Theatre and Raun Raun. One was Raun Isi, which was shown in the video. Though it appears that Raun Isi is one of the provincial theatres advocated by the National Theatre, according to Murphy, it was initially begun as a result of Raun Raun's efforts. One of Raun Raun's objectives was to encourage the development of theatre groups on a smaller scale in the villages. This effort was coordinated through its Papua New Guinea Theatre and Media Regional Development Program (Murphy 1981b, 51).

Another small theatre company is Dua Dua based in Lae, it is the theatre of Morobe Province. It was formed in 1979 by a group of unemployed school leavers and one girl who was a student at Lae High School at the time ("Doing it ...") . Their primary goal for the audience was to entertain them, but their goal for themselves was to "keep them away from trouble." They were also concerned about the culture and wanted to use theatre to the "save the culture from dying out, and to learn and teach the culture for later generations to come" (Smith, 147).

Another group, the Mendo Cultural and Theatre Group, was visited by Sei! on their 1989 tour. Described as "struggling... tucked away on a mountain top in the Southern Highlands" (Smith, 147), Mendo focuses on the performance of folk plays.

Sei! Akson Tim in the Solomon Islands

Although the first goal stated for the formation of Sei! was to "help preserve customs and culture" (Solomon ... 1989: 4), in practice, the work of Sei! in the Solomon Islands is profoundly different from the popular theatre groups in Papua New Guinea. The objective is not the preservation of culture or even to transform culture, but culture is used to further the objectives of the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), a grassroots non-government organization which began in 1982 to work in development education. More specifically, their goals are explicitly to advocate a "people-centered vision of development" (ibid: 2).

Sei! was conceived in 1987 by the management team of the SIDT to not only help preserve customs and culture, but more importantly to:

> present important social educational issues in a lively and entertaining manner; to encourage villagers to confront and organize around (the) issue; and to create an educational resource to assist government and NGOs in their village extention work (ibid: 4).

With the sponsorship of CUSO (Canadian University Service Overseras), a Canadian overseas volunteer program, Campbell Smith was hired to put the program together. His title, popular theatre animateur, comes from the theories of Brazilian educator Paulo Friere, and refers to a person who facillitates the education of non-literates. For Friere, education involves the "conscientization" of the masses stricken with poverty, or "the awakening of critical awareness" so that the non-literate poor can understand the source of their poverty. (Epskamp:19). The objectives of SIDT are not that different from Frierian ones in that they are related to a kind of development that promotes social values, as oppposed to conventional economic development -- the typical kind of development that the Pacific Island countries pursue (Griffen:16), including the Solomon Islands government, (Smith:140). SIDT's mission statement reveals its social concerns:

> To empower villagers through development education and political awareness and to strengthen village life through local organizational efforts and village economic viability (Solomon ... 1989:11).

Sei! was formed to pursue the same objectives as SIDT -- "to bring development awareness to villagers, and to deepen (their) understanding of how the world works" (Roughan 1991a). Campbell Smith, now in Belize after four years in the Solomons, reiterates this perspective when he explains the group's name, which is a Pidgin word to express surprise or disapproval:

> And that's precisely what the team's after -- to stimulate interaction and debate and encourage villagers to get involved in development decisions. Too often they are the victims of development; too rarely the developers (Smith: 140).

The logging play depicted in the video Em I Graun Blong Yumi is the archetype of the application of SIDT's awareness goals. This action, or *akson,* as the performances are called, entitled Stori Abaot Wanfala Vilij is the one most performed by Sei!; it's popularity reflects the actual threat that the foreign logging companies posed for the people and their forests. As more and more logging companies tried to gain access to trees, Sei! attempted to reach the villagers first, to get them to think about the issue.

The campaign against logging also included SIDT's other means of development education. The "backbone" of SIDT's work are the mobile teams; these teams consist of villagers trained to work within one area, usually this is designated as one language group sharing information with the villagers in that area. They conduct workshops on various topics, such as logging, disaster awareness, raising the quality of village life, and "especially political awareness" (Solomon ... 1989: 10). According to the Summary Report, "without these village-level workshops, much of the work of LINK magazine, the Sei! theatre group, and SIDT itself could not bear fruit" (ibid: 10). Their magazine LINK is another method that they employ to flow information to the villagers. But more importantly, the magazine has become a means of communication between the villagers

the politicians in town. The *komiks* (comics) were yet another tool that was used, along with the Sei! theatre work, to get information to the non-literate (ibid: 7).

Because Sei!'s audiences are largely non-literate[1], innovative means must be used to get the information to them. The theatre form is especially effective for these audiences because of Sei!'s emphasis on visual images, village language, and audience involvement (ibid: 5). The addition of the *komiks* passed out after a certain action is performed help to recall the message in another form.

There have been indications that SIDT's work has had an impact. In 1989, LINK had over two dozen stories on logging. The editors claim this attention is responsible for the logging interests being "on the defensive" (ibid: 6). One story reported that at Harumou, after seeing the action, some villagers changed their mind about letting a logging company into the area ("Sei! On ..." 1989: 4). A village chief is quoted in the Summary Report responding to the logging action:

> After meeting with the logging company we were ready to invite the company onto our land but after your Akson I think we must take another look at the situation (Solomon ... 1989: 5).

Moreover, John Roughan, founder of the SIDT, said at a recent seminar at the University of Hawai`i at Manoa (1993b), that the government is now making it more difficult for the logging companies to do business in the Solomons and the companies are beginning to pull out because they now see "the writing on the walls" (ibid).

Not all the actions are as consequential and weighty as the logging one. Many of the others are about more mundane yet important topics, such as nutrition, family planning, and immunization. Though these are development messages from the "top-down" [2] (government and non-government agencies) rather than an expression of needs

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[1] According to John Roughan, only 27% of the men, and 11% of the women are able to read.

[2] I say this at the risk of offending SIDT, who strive to be people-centered in their approach. I am saying that these development *messages* are "top-down." They represent education and information that the people do not have, that they need to have, that come from the top--the leaders, the agencies, etc. Much of SIDT's work does come from bottom-up information gathering as well (Roughan 1993b).

from the people themselves, this does not conflict with SIDT's objective, to strengthen village life. These "top-down" messages are essential for villager survival, especially if this is the only way the villagers have been able to understand the messages, some of which may be matters of life and death, for example in the immunization campaign.

In August of 1989, two members of Sei! traveled to Madang Province in Papua New Guinea to work with a local drama group on health development issues. While there, they had an opportunity to compare their work with another group.

> While PNG was theatrically more advanced than what Sei! was doing, it lacked the SIDT Mobile Team structure which pointedly drew out development meanings and understanding (Solomon ... 1989: 4).

This reaffirms that Sei!'s goals are aligned with SIDT's in being socially-oriented, and so they are not concerned with creating theatre as art. Sei!'s priority is development awareness for the people; theatre is a tool for this. The use of the term "action" rather than "play" reinforces the fact that they make no pretensions that they are creating a work of art.

Because Sei!'s message is important, the action must be as simple, direct, and entertaining as possible. Smith describes it as "just bare bones." Compared to the spectacular presentations that Raun Raun produces, Sei! is a lesson in minimalism. Props are mimed or they are pulled from the bush or borrowed from villagers. Costumes are virtually non-existent. Each performance is improvised, though the basic shape and content of the actions are established in rehearsal. A narrator is used to "harness the performance, to make sure that the storyline stays relatively on course and the essential material is clearly expressed" (Smith 1992: 141).

Because SIDT is a non-government organization, they don't have the same need for caution that the state-supported theatres in Papua New Guinea have to contend with. In 1989, the SIDT was funded by government and non-government organizations from all over the world, with a religious non-government organization from the Netherlands

supplying the greatest percentage (31%) of the budget (Solomon ...1989: 12). This gives SIDT the ability to pursue its objectives of people-empowerment, which may at times conflict with government policy. For example, LINK reported that certain politicians tried to stop the logging workshops but because they do not have pursestring power over SIDT, the politicians' presumed authority did not carry any weight (ibid: 6).

Though the national government does not control SIDT's pursestrings, do the aid organizations pose similar limitations on them? Apparently not, as the work of Sei! and SIDT continues to grow with the support of charitable foreign aid. According to John Roughan, there are funding organizations all over the world that share the same values as SIDT, values that have to do with preserving the forests and the environment, promoting women's issues, literacy, population education, disaster awareness and the like. Because of the shared values, these groups have been generous in providing SIDT with the funds that it needs to carry out its mission (Roughan 1993b).

Wan Smol Bag in Vanuatu

Like Sei! Wan Smol Bag Theatre of Vanuatu was founded on development education principles, to get information to the rural areas (Walker 1993). But their work is not as straightforward as Sei!'s. In addition to "information," They also wanted to bring "drama" to the Vanuatu community.

> Bigfala tingting blong grup ia hemi blong karem pleiplei blong olgeta i go long eni ples long eni komuniti, long Vanuatu ... ("Pikja..." 1989: 5).

As we have seen in the difference between Raun Raun's work and Sei!'s, this can make a profound difference. The reasons for bringing "drama" to the villagers are not as clear as bringing information and therefore the role of this "drama" in development is ambiguous.

Wan Smol Bag was initiated in January 1989 by expatriates Peter Walker, a theatre person trained in the United Kingdom and his wife Joanne, a teacher at Malapoa College

with Joe Bong, Charleon Falau, and Peter Licht[1], three ni-Vanuatus. Now at an exciting stage of growth, they currently have two groups, one with six members and the other with four trainees. The trainees were recently recruited after a two-day audition process which included games, discussions, and acting scenes (Walker 1993). Unlike Sei! who still has not been able to lift cultural restrictions on single women traveling without chaperones (Roughan 1993b), Wan Smol Bag sought a woman to join their group early in their development. In November of 1989, an article announced that Wan Smol Bag was looking for a woman to join them. The requirements were that she must not be married, be free to travel, and must not have problems with her family about doing this kind of work ("Wan Smol Bag ino Stop Grow"...1989: 5). In the video, Em I Graun Blong Yumi, the woman that they hired, Nora Gorden, is interviewed about this situation:

> The Melanesian way of thinking makes it hard, because people see me, the only woman with all these guys, and they think I fancy them all. They should realize the importance of having a woman in the group. Especially for the women of Vanuatu.[2]

The form and structure of their work varies. Unlike Sei!, who create their plays through a process of improvisation, most of Wan Smol Bag's work is scripted. The Walkers and Jo Dorras, after discussions with the group, write the plays. About a third of their plays are created through improvisation, role played, and discussed at length by the group. A method of creating a play depicted in the video, Em I Graun Blong Yumi reflects popular theatre at its most "genuine." Here the village determined the problem they wanted to deal with, and with the villagers as actors and in some cases directors, the theatre helped to facillitate the play-making process to serve the needs of the people themselves.

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[1]Licht has since died in a car crash. The video Em I Graun Blong Yumi is dedicated to him.

[2] Interesting visual images are presented as Nora is interviewed. First, a woman is shown carrying a mat into a hut, then a woman holding a baby, then a woman bathing a child, and finally, a woman is seen hanging laundry.

The core of Wan Smol Bag's work has been on health issues: sanitation, family planning, STD/AIDs, and injections (Walker 1993). In the video, one of their "raucous" health plays, presumably having to do with dysentery, is shown. One of their recent projects was the production of a video, Like Any Other Lovers, about AIDS prevention, which won an award this year from the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) for video production of the year. They have taken this play on tour throughout the region, and recently appeared as far away as Guam. A radio play, I No Save Hapen Festaem, about teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, was recently aired ("I No..." 1993: 3).

Other types of information plays have been on domestic violence, pre-school, cyclone preparation and environment plays. The logging play as seen in Em I Graun Blong Yumi, was written for children, but has a more universal message, for "evri sitizen blong planet eth" ("Wan Smol Bag Theatre Bae i Putum Wan Pleiplei" 1990: 6).

An unstated objective, but evident in their endeavors, is to present traditional culture, custom stories, and Vanuatu history in play form. One entitled The Old Stories, is a play about the history of Vanuatu "from the time of the old gods and heroes to the missionaries and blackbirders of the 19th century" (Dorras and Walker n.d.). Funded by the Australian South Pacific Cultures Fund, it was written and published to be used as a resource play for communities as well as for the classroom. It has also been performed regularly in Port Vila in English. When on tour to the rural areas, it is performed in Bislama.

With the information type of plays, it is possible to determine at some level whether or not the play has had an impact. According to Walker, they do know that more people have gone to a clinic for immunizations after a performance, for example. For the history and culture plays, the impact is not as clear. Walker says he is satisfied "knowing that the audience has enjoyed the performance" (Walker 1993). "Entertainment,"

therefore, seems to be a goal. If that is the case, it is easily assessed by the audience response, which has been positive.

I agree that entertainment, especially humor, is a worthwhile endeavor. However, I also believe it is important to strive for goals beyond that. Entertainment can be both a tool to numb the masses, as well as a positive force to empower them. It is important, especially in developing countries, to be aware of the potential to do as much harm as good. Defined goals can serve to keep an organization to a designated path so as not to do harm; if one deviates from the path, one may find oneself in murky waters.

An example of this murkiness is Wan Smol Bag's involvement in the tourist industry. They seem to have taken a non-critical stand on tourism development, in fact they manifest a pro-active position on tourism promotion as entertainers in a drama of Vanuatu legends and some history meant for tourists. Called The Vanuatu Show, the performance includes a creation story, the legend from the island of Pentecost about the first man and woman, Turani and Tarivenue, who grew out of a clamshell; a legend of how the Yasur volcano on Tanna was formed; the story of the arrival of the first white man; the origin of the Pentecost land dive; and a dramatization of blackbirding, among other plays ("New Tourist..." 1991: 13).

Though locals are welcome, the price of 1,500 vatu per person, essentially prohibits the locals from attending, unless they are well off. The promoter claims that the price is "reasonable" when compared to overseas theatrical shows. It is, therefore, "reasonable" only for those audiences who would patronize these types of shows. Perhaps this criticism is inconsequential; this is a tourist attraction and does not pretend to be anything else.

After all, the idea for this show came from tour industry businessmen, who were drinking together in a kava bar, discussing various ways to help the tourist industry. Yet, if Wan Smol Bag's goal was to be a popular theatre with the "aim to transmit health and

educational information to the rural areas" ("New Tourist..." 1991: 13), how can this endeavor be justified by them?

For one thing, there is the matter of funding. Peter Walker is reported to have agreed to put on the show to provide the group with a regular income, "so we don't have to ask so much from the overseas donors" (ibid). Secondly, the "culture" project appears to be a justifiable endeavor. In this case, educating outsiders about Vanuatu history and culture is considered to be a worthwhile activity.

Apparently, Wan Smol Bag does not have ideological problems with tourism, in fact it recently traveled with a group of tourist operators to a travel show in Auckland and then traveled throughout New Zealand promoting tourism in Vanuatu ("NTO leads ..." 1992: 15). The benefits of tourism to the local people is debatable, but this association with tourism deflects from Wan Smol Bag's original orientation towards being a people-centered educational theatre.[1]

Wan Smol Bag now has substantial funding from the Overseas Development Administration (ODA, an United Kingdom funding agency) to be a regional training resource (Walker 1993). The main goal for the current three-year funding period is to start theatre groups in other countries in the region. There now seems to be an acceptance that overseas aid is not neccessarily a bad thing, and can in fact enable Wan Smol Bag to pursue its objectives, remain people-centered, and thus promote a people-centered kind of development.

[1] If the people themselves want tourism, can tourist theatre be considered people-centered? To answer that question, I suggest a cost-benefit analysis that includes social and environmental costs of tourism, as well as an analysis of who is actually benefiting financially and how those financial benefits are distributed.

CONCLUSION

The tensions depicted in the video Em I Graun Blong Yumi involve conflicts between the traditional and the modern, the foreign and the indigenous, the forests and the logging companies. The resolution of these tensions was obvious; some change is good and some change is bad. Use the good to overcome the bad. Popular theatre was depicted as a good modern change that is helping to confront the destructive logging practices. The further study of popular theatre in Melanesia in the second part of the essay exemplifies even more tensions. These same tensions are prominent in discussions about the problems of development. Mainly the question of who the theatre is for, which is related to the question of who the development is for, is prominent. Is it for the people? And if so, how so?

In Papua New Guinea the resolution of the question of what a national theatre should look like, was a milestone in the direction of policy for the national theatre. The decision to decentralize the national theatre appears to be a positive one in terms of supporting a theatre that is to be more oriented to serve the people. This is demonstrated by Raun Isi's logging play depicted in the video, which is meant to raise the level of awareness of the people of Gahom who are only now beginning to deal with development dilemmas, such as logging. The danger is that concentrating only on the individual communities may work to isolate communities from each other and from the world. That interaction between different groups of people was a positive function that Raun Raun served in the country's cultural development.

The study and celebration of separate cultures should only be one facet of the celebration of culture in general. Something about the Niugini Niugini trilogy appeals to me, though I have only read about and heard about these performances at the Festival of the Pacific. The achievement of presenting a work that transcends cultural boundaries and causes one to have respect and awe for a rich group of cultures is noteworthy. As indicated, multicultural, fusion, and intercultural projects should all be attempted, and thus

be subject to discussion, criticism, and celebration -- not only at festivals, but among the people themselves.

Also in Papua New Guinea, tension is shown when the state-sponsored theatres must be careful that it does not do or say anything that may offend the government. Theatre work needs funding, whether from the government or from aid organizations. The question is not whether or not governments should fund popular theatre (yes, they should), but whether democratic nations can allow and support basic freedoms, such as the freedom to criticize and question their governments. If true democracy is a goal of national development, then state-supported theatre *can* be people-centered. In the video, there is evidence of this freedom as Raun Isi and the Friends of the Sepik work together to inform the villagers about questions they can ask a government official, the forestry officer. However, that the Sankamap theatre in Bougainville was suppressed is evidence to the contrary.

Like the split in the work of Raun Raun, for Wan Smol Bag there is a similar split between the information sharing objectives and the preservation of culture goals. Moreover, the work developed for the presentation of culture became used as a tourist attraction in Wan Smol Bag's case. It may be obvious that I have some biases regarding that issue. I do not think all history and culture plays are necessarily exploitative. They can be educational and empowering for the people, but that depends on who the plays are performed for, for one thing[1]. When the audiences are tourists, the integrity of the theatre group comes into question. Luckily, this was not a major part of Wan Smol Bag's work. As discussed, the involvement of the villagers in the creation of their own play to solve a problem is an achievement in itself. Perhaps with adequate funding that they have now secured, more of this type of work can continue.

Of the groups included in this analysis, Sei! stands out as the most effective in terms of promoting a people-centered development. Though they do not actually create

[1]And the content, themes, and production success, are other determining factors.

the plays with the villagers, they take as themes issues that are important to the villagers and to the country in general. It may appear that there is a pre-determined agenda, an ideology that their parent organization, the SIDT, is promoting. They do have a bias and readily admit this. In LINK, a letter from a logging company official was printed in which he complained that LINK was biased against the logging companies. LINK's defense was, yes, they are biased, but it is in favor of the villagers (Solomon ... 1989: 6). Though it may appear to be "top-down" information flow, it is information that would otherwise be denied the villagers in favor of possibly exploitive activity. Moreover, the people are involved in the discussions following the performances. Theatre can be "bottom-up," for example when the villagers determine the content of the play themselves, but sometimes it is necessary for organizations such as Sei! and SIDT to take the lead in getting information to the villagers.

Popular theatre in Melanesia appears to be on the rise, and hopefully will spread to other islands in the Pacific region. But it is important that people examine the political contexts of their endeavors. Asking who the theatre (or the play) is for and for what reasons is essential. If the Pacific Island people and governments do indeed embark on sustainable, alternative, and truly democratic paths to development, then this kind theatre will be a valuable means of supporting people's needs and promoting their goals for themselves. This development journey involves coming to terms with change. As laid out in the video -- it's not all good, and it's not all bad. To reiterate from the first part of the essay, in the end, it is the blend of elements, discerning the positive from the destructive, whether from the traditional culture or from the new culture, that will lead to long-term survival. Theatre can be a useful tool to aid in the sorting-out process in a "development agenda based on a vision of transformation which enriches the human spirit, enhances economic justice, and preserves life sustaining systems" (Korten 1990: 170), for this is also a vision for theatre.

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